Wanderer 17

Chapter 17: A painful endeavour

Today was the day.

Percy had finished mending the new cracks, restoring his soul to a pristine condition. He'd also refilled both cores and got a good night's sleep. Adding to that, baldy had arranged for his children to manage the family, freeing himself to oversee his grandson's venture.

Admittedly, Percy felt a little guilty over it.

Somehow, their strained relationship had evolved to the point of him monopolizing his grandpa's time, which he knew was precious. The man was a Violet with an entire House to run and hundreds of people to look after, yet here he was, focusing his efforts on a Red-born teenager.

'I'll make it up to him.'

Even if he couldn't find a way to get stronger, he had to bring something back for his family.

Going over all the steps in his mind once more, Percy cleared his thoughts, beginning the process. First, he activated Soul Vision, tuning it to look at his own soul. Gathering mana on his fingertips, he placed his hand right in front of his sternum.

Next, he sent a pulse of mana through his soul, letting it reflect off its edges. The moment it all returned to his chest, he seized the opportunity to grab the newly formed bump. He slowly pulled it outwards, ignoring the painful tears that started to form as the silver flame left the boundary of his flesh.

Only after it stabilized did he send another pulse of mana from his core, trying to reinforce the damaged regions as he forced the protrusion to enlarge.

'So far, so good.'

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Wave after wave, refill after refill, hour after hour, Percy continued to cultivate the ethereal substance in his hand. It was the very fabric he would craft his clone from.

Soon after starting, he'd been elated to discover his soul was more durable than last time! He guessed the awakening of his second core had influenced it. Neither Percy nor Archibald had ever heard that one's grade affected their soul, but then again, they hardly knew much about soul affinities to begin with.

In hindsight, it wasn't that odd either. The fact that promotions strengthened one's body was common knowledge. It would be stranger if they didn't have a similar impact on other aspects of one's existence. If this hadn't been the case, a Red core with a soul affinity would be able to kill a White with a sneaky spell, which was absurd to imagine.

Either way, the young man gladly welcomed all the help he could get. And it did help, as his soul was noticeably more resilient, the tears forming just a touch more slowly.

Waiting for his core to refill for the umpteenth time, he tossed a quick glance out the window.

'The sun is about to set…'

Apparently, he'd been at it for over twelve hours. The orb in his hand was already larger than an apple. He was getting tired too, the concentration and pain taking a toll on his mind. His original plan had been to pull an all-nighter, gathering as much of his soul as possible before cutting out the clone.

But that didn't seem very realistic now. While he could push himself to go on, it appeared there was a limit to how much of his soul he could pull out at once. The more he accumulated, the greater the pressure was, causing the cracks to appear faster. Right now, the damage was piling up more quickly than his newly strengthened soul and his manual reinforcement could handle.

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‘Ok then. Let’s move to the next phase ahead of time.’

As soon as his core was refilled, he pulled the soul mana again. Unlike before, he didn’t send another pulse, instead gathering it manually inside the blob. For the next two hours, Percy filled the orb with as much mana as he could manage, causing it to glow more brightly, until even baldy could faintly see it.

Moving the mana directly into it resulted in fewer losses, but the bump didn’t grow in size. Unless the mana travelled through his soul first, it didn’t have that effect. That was clearly an aspect of his bloodline he’d inherited from his family.

The reason he was adding more mana to the orb was to give his clone some means of protecting himself later. He didn’t know what circumstances he’d find himself in, but he figured having a stockpile of mana to fall back to might be handy.

‘Or maybe not.’ he shrugged. ‘But it’s worth a shot.’

Finally, he refilled his core one last time and – after giving his grandpa a resolute look – he fully activated his ability.

The ghostly claw violently bolted out of his sternum, heading straight towards the thrumming blob. Wherever it passed, it carved nasty gouges in the silver flame, causing Percy to experience a world of agony. Not just that, but the tears that already existed widened, making the situation worse.

Only after the claw entered the blob did something change, as it began to sizzle, the orb swelling and contracting around it a couple of times. Then…

SNAP

A loud shockwave rippled through Percy. The last thing he saw before his eyelids fell shut was a silver comet blasting out of his bedroom’s wall.

‘Go… Soar through the cosmos little me…’

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“Fuck.” was the first word that came out of his mouth.

The original Percy’s that was – not the clone’s. His head ached as if it had been split in half. And if not, perhaps he should consider it. It might be an improvement. He was lying on his bed, in a pool of sweat, the sheets sticking to his back.

“How are you feeling?” baldy asked, sitting on a chair next to him.

The man’s hand was raised, a gentle green glow radiating from it. Not that it did much, as the source of Percy’s pain wasn’t something life mana could help with. Still, he did appreciate the gesture.

“Like I’ve torn out a part of my soul.” the young man grinned. “How long was I out this time?”

“Just the night.”

Percy exhaled in relief. This was good. Not only had he recovered much sooner, but he’d done so before his clone returned – which was progress. Evidently, his efforts over the past few weeks hadn’t been for naught.

But thinking of a possibility, he paled.

‘Unless the clone crumbled earlier than the last one?!’

Panicking, he tried pulling some mana to his eyes, to check his soul’s condition. He frowned. His core was surprisingly empty. It should have recovered on its own by now, since he’d slept for a long time…

Over the next few minutes, he meditated to speed up his regeneration, managing to manually gather some mana, eventually.

Turning Soul Vision on, he examined himself, his features soon twisting at the sight. His soul was in even worse shape than the first time he'd ever laid eyes on it. Technically, it wasn't too surprising. Back then, it had already had weeks to heal on its own before he learned about his affinity.

Still, the sight was unsettling to behold. The tears were too wide and too deep to be described as 'cracks' anymore. Some regions looked like they were held together by a few scant strands, about to break off any moment now. But the worst part was the hole in his chest. It was as if a giant had scooped out a huge chunk of his soul with an oversized spoon, as the edges in the crater squirmed, leaking mana.

'That explains why my core is empty.'

Apparently, his soul was frantically sucking the mana out of his sternum, trying to hold itself together.

Yet, it wasn't all bad news. Stretching out of the hole in his chest, Percy felt something extending into the distance. It was invisible even to Soul Vision, somehow even less corporeal than soul mana. If he had to describe it, it was as if somebody had grabbed an idea and rolled it up into a rope. Like an umbilical cord, letting him sense that his soul clone was still out there, somewhere.

PHEW

Only then did he let out the turbid breath he'd been holding.

'At least, it wasn't all for nothing.'

He sure hoped his clone would survive longer than the other one. And if he was lucky, even bring back something useful when it was done. For now, he could find comfort in the fact he was awake and could do other things while waiting.

It didn't seem he could practice his soul magic, as his mana was still busy trying to keep his soul together, but perhaps he could feed his second core elixirs and get a bit more used to it over the next few days.

'Back to the grind, I suppose.'